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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an instructional strategy found to be effective in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional (CLDE) students. The strategy, called "Committees," involves dividing the class into small groups and assigning each group a different activity revolving around a selected theme or concept. Students rotate through each committee to have the opportunity to participate in each activity. When planning committee activities for CLDE students, input from each member of the instructional team is most important. The classroom teacher, special education teacher, bilingual or English-as-a-Second-Language specialist, and speech therapist work together as an instructional team to identify special learning needs for CLDE students. The paper outlines 10 committee planning steps, offers a committee cycle planning sheet, describes a method of using file folders to manage committee activities, presents a flow chart of instructional team planning, and provides a unit planning sheet and evaluation form. (JDD)

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Committees in the Bilingual Special Education Program

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Abstract

The authors describe an instructional strategy that they found to be effective in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional (CLDE) students. The strategy, Committees, uses small groups and hands-on activities to teach integrated units. The instructional team can include the teacher, speech therapist, educational assistant, parent, counselor, or even the students who work together to plan, implement and evaluate instruction. The authors describe the advantages of using committees and outline the steps to develop them. Organizational tips are also included.

Committees in the Bilingual Special Education Program

After Committee time, the speech therapist turned to the special day class teacher to exclaim, "Did you see what Juan did?!" In a small group with an interesting, involving activity, a normally quiet and shy student had broken into excited conversation in English! Not only was the student learning English as a Second Language, he was also communicative disordered. The activity was a success not only for the student, but for the teachers as well. Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional (CLDE) students like Juan means taking into account language acquisition and cultural needs.

For students learning English as a Second Language, second language development begins with comprehensible input(Krashen, 1982). Committees lend themselves well to the idea of providing comprehensibe input for students who are learning English as a second language. Students have the opportunity to pose questions and experiment and problem solve in small groups. Committees allow for language extension and genuine dialogue as well as interaction with concrete materials.

What are Committees? "In the context of the classroom, the word 'committees' refers to an instructional strategy by which the teacher divides the class into small groups and assigns each a different activity (Bluestein, 1982, p. 225)". The activities revolve around a selected theme or concept. Specific days and times are set aside for children to participate in committees. Each committee is assigned a different project or activity and the activities are rotated each time the committees meet. There are as many committees as the number of committee meetings per week. That way students get the opportunity to participate in each committee. For special day classes, 20 minutes 3 times a week gives the students enough time for work on projects. Committee activities for a one week committee cycle on transportation could include:

1. graphing by color the number of cars in the parking lot.

2. experimenting with objects that sink or float
3. contributing to a mural of various modes of transportation based on field trips to the balloon fiesta and the air force base.

Cooperative Planning

Committees provide an ideal setting for teachers and specialists to plan and work cooperatively in the special day classroom or in the regular classroom. For example, the speech therapist can focus on particular language skills with one child and at the same time reinforce the skills of the others in the group. For second language learners, instruction can be provided in the native language by a bilingual specialist for one group while the other groups receive English instruction.. Committees can be a tool to transition students during mainstreaming. Concepts and skills can first be taught by specialists in the special day class setting. Those same specialists can then use Committee time in the regular classroom to reinforce or extend familiar concepts and vocabulary in an new environment.

Cooperative Learning

Although Committees involve cooperation between students, it is not necessarily cooperative learning. And although committees are always conducted in small groups, it is more than teacher directed small group instruction. Student autonomy in Committees ranges from teacher directed with teacher - student interaction, to teacher directed with student - student - teacher interaction, to student directed with student-student interaction. With our young special day class students, the teachers and specialists directed the activities. We were able to schedule some academic activities using cooperative learning after students were more familiar with the procedures and had developed the needed social skills.

Instructional Team Planning

When planning committees for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional (CLDE) students, input from each member of the instructional team is most important. The classroom teacher, special education teacher, bilingual or ESL specialist and speech therapist work together as an instructional team to identify special learning needs for CLDE students. The membership of the team depends on who will direct activities during the committee cycle. If other specialists or parents are regularly involved during committee time, their input should be considered during planning time as well. Instructional team planning functions on the idea that the members of the team are peers who have special knowledge of children and planning.

For example, the speech therapist has a tremendous bank of knowledge and expertise regarding language development. The bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) specialist has a great deal to offer regarding second language acquisition. As the student is learning English, certain errors may occur. The bilingual or ESL specialist can help the instructional team determine which behaviors are a natural part of the acquisition of a second language. Activities that are effective for English development can be identified and included in the unit plan.

Planning for committees begins at the school level and should fit into the school's philosophy of learning and the goals for its students. Based on the school's curriculum and the student's special education goals and objectives, the teacher determines topics and themes to be addressed during the year. In the development of committees, the instructional team closely examines individual student needs and the instructional characteristics that can be employed to meet those needs. Through observation, review of assessment results, and review of the IEP, the team can identify objective, content to be included, language of instruction, instructional strategies and how to group students for committees.

Language of Instruction

Bilingual students come to school with a great diversity of communication skills. Based on observation and language assessment, language dominance and proficiency can be determined. Ortiz and Yates (1989) suggest that language remediation for students with communication disorders be provided in the student's native language whenever possible.

In some classrooms, it may not be feasible to conduct instruction for the whole class in Spanish. Committees provide an excellent opportunity for small group instruction which includes the CLDE student's language needs. For example, one day the Spanish speaking student could work with the Spanish speaking special education teacher on integrated activities taught in the native language. The next day, the same student could work in the next committee with the English speaking Speech and Language Specialist on activities to develop English. All in a coordinated effort to meet individual language related learning needs.

Identify Social Needs

Through observation in the classroom and on the school campus, social interaction needs can be determined. For many special education students, social skills will need development. Identifying student social needs will be important in assigning students to small group activities. It will be important for students to have skills such as taking turns, making polite requests, and expressing their needs. For second language learners, it is important to check that social skills have been learned in English. These skills can easily be taught or reinforced during committee time. For students who do not yet have these skills, it may be necessary to begin with activities for groups of 2 or activities where everyone has their own materials.

Management Tools

Some teachers use 8 1/2" x 11" posters made of laminated construction paper or poster board as management tools. A pocket is glued onto each poster. Index cards are completed for each group with each member's name on the card. The teacher then places the card in the pocket of that group's activity for the day. That way students know beforehand in which committee they

will participate. Veronica Nolan, a teacher at Longfellow Elementary, uses Printshop, a computer program, to make her posters more attractive. She post each one on the chalkboard so that students know their schedule in advance.

Another idea is to use file folders . The planning and evaluation sheets go inside the folder to be used during the activity and for easy storage in the filing cabinet after the committee cycle has been completed. Baskets, decorated boxes or five gallon ice cream tubs can be used to store materials for each committee. Once they have been prepared for all committees, they are ready for the entire committee cycle.

Conclusion

We have described one instructional strategy that we used with our students. We found that Committees are an effective way to meet the instructional needs of CLDE students. One benefit was the collaboration between specialists. Because the instruction occurred in the classroom without pullout, the adults involved felt that they were an important part of the class. Also, we were able to pick up new teaching strategies as we worked together planning, and could watch and listen as the activities were followed through. In this way we were able to learn and reinforce the best of what the other was teaching. This made the educational program one for the students, as instructional ownership was shared. there was constant communication about progress.

Committee Planning Steps

1. **Identify the school's theme.**

This is usually done at the school level with input from all staff. Some schools identify a theme to be followed throughout the school year. Longfellow Elementary in the Albuquerque Public School District has selected the bilingual theme "Explorar, Decidir, Vivir" (Explore, Decide, Live). Another theme used in the past was "Rainbow of Cultures".

2. **Plan a specific time to run committees.**

For most students it is more effective to schedule committees at the same time each day. (Committees every Monday, Wednesday and Friday before morning recess, for example). Rotate committees so that each student gets the chance to participate in each activity.

3. **Determine the classroom units.**

Based on the students' learning goals and objectives, and on the school curriculum, identify a number of topics that could be incorporated. It is usually easier to plan the unit topics for the entire year or semester in advance. While this takes time in the beginning of the school year, it saves time in the long run.

4. **Plan objectives for your committee cycles.**

Use the student's Individualized Educational Program objectives to guide which activities you will select for your committee cycles. See Figure 2 for an example of a planning sheet in progress for a unit on New Mexico.

6. **Brainstorm as many ideas as you can about activities related to your topic and student objectives.**

Which academic areas can you integrate with the topic you have chosen? Which activities can incorporate the students' cultural backgrounds? Which areas of expertise can each participant of the instructional team bring to enhance the unit? Many teacher idea books offer activities that can incorporate that which the student is familiar with. The Brown Paper Bag book series offers a wealth of activities for history, geography, physical education, mathematics, science, astronomy, and more! These activities can be adapted to meet special learning needs.

7. **Identify materials that will be needed and designate who will bring them to the classroom.**

This could involve the students themselves bringing realia from their homes or neighborhood. Parents are always an excellent resource. Through conversation you can identify resources and often get help bringing in materials relevant to the student.

8. **For each committee identify the instructional objective; process skills that will be used (observing, classifying, etc.); materials; directions; key discussion questions; extension activities; and method of evaluation.**

Abruscato (1988) uses these organizers to plan science units. Besides being a guide for direction of the activity, it can also serve as a record of instruction. It is especially helpful to parents or volunteers who come in to work with committee groups. Discussion questions which tap the objectives of the activity and topic can be prepared beforehand. Extension activities can be available for those students who finish before the other groups in the class.

9. **Implement Instruction.**

10. Evaluate student progress.

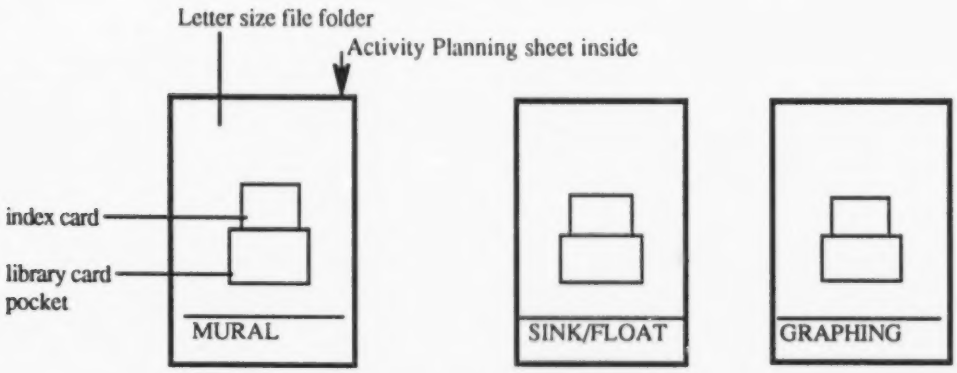
Evaluation can involve direct questions or even parts of a criterion referenced test. Of course, the evaluation should be related to the objective of the committee. It should also involve what went well, what you would change for next time, and student input about favorite and least favorite activities.

Committee Cycle Planning Sheet

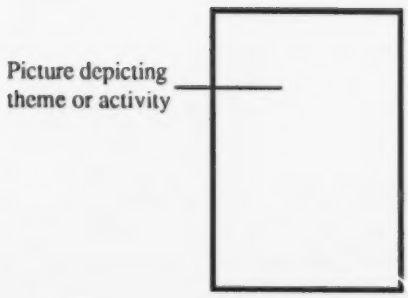
Activity:	1 Sink or Float	2 Graphing Cars	3 Mural
Directed by:	Teacher science table	Speech Therapist parking lot	Educational Assistant hallway floor
Grouping: Monday	Elena, Carlos, Maria ——— Spanish	Bob, Sue, Nguyen ——— English	Annie, Max Cisco, Leah ——— Bilingual
Wednesday	Max, Annie, Cisco, Leah ——— English	Elena, Carlos, Maria ——— English	Bob, Sue Nguyen ——— English
Friday	Bob, Sue, Nguyen ——— English as a Second Language	Annie, Max, Cisco, Leah ——— English	Elena, Carlos, Maria ——— Bilingual

Using File Folders to Manage Committee Activities

Front view



Back view



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Ortiz, A. A. & Yates J. R. (1989) Staffing and the development of individualized educational programs for the bilingual exceptional student. In L. M. Baca & H. T. Cervantes The Bilingual Special Education Interface (pp. 183 - 203) Columbus: Merrill.

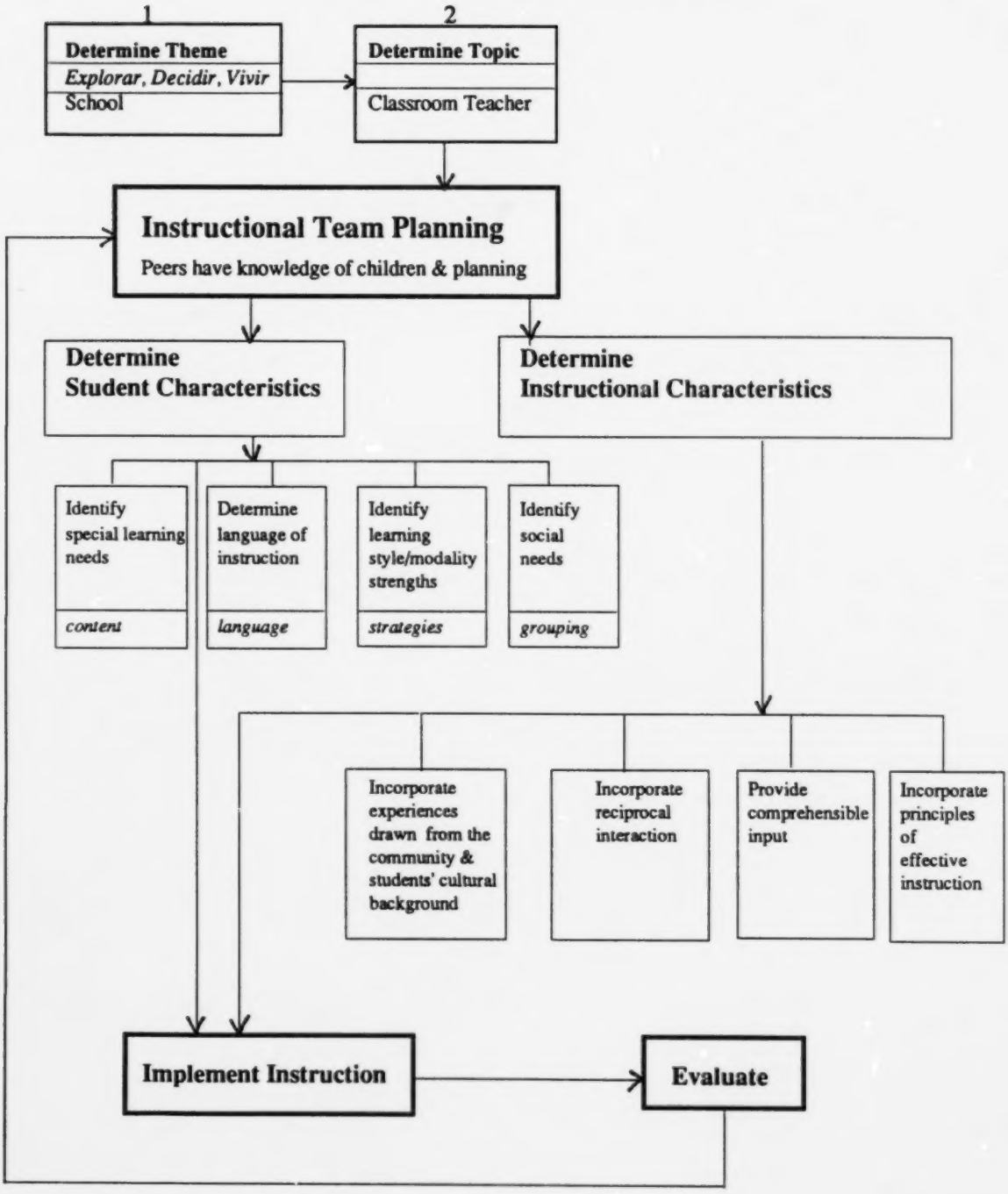
Theme: Explorar, Decidir, Vivir

Unit: New Mexico

COMMITTEE CYCLE PLANNING GUIDE

SCIENCE	SOCIAL STUDIES	MATH	ART
		Story Problems w money: Role Play - 1 Stud is merchant 1 student buyer - specific buying task 5th gr. Math / goal 7	Sand painting: • Explore how to color sand. • Primary & Secondary colors • Symbolism 3 gr / G 3 - Creating Art

Instructional Team Planning in Committees



INTEGRATED UNIT PLANNING SHEET

BASIC CONCEPT:

PROCESS SKILLS

- Observing
- Classifying
- Communicating
- Using Numbers
- Inferring
- Predicting

OBJECTIVES

Language Arts
Math
Science
Social Studies
Art
Physical Education
Music
Special Days

MATERIALS NEEDED

Books
Records
Films/Videos
Computer Programs
Realia

ENVIRONMENTAL SET-UP

Learning Centers
Bulletin Boards
Murals

EXTENSION IDEAS

Field Trips
Guest Speakers

EVALUATION OF UNIT

Have students answer questions such as the following:
What did you like best in the unit?
What did you like least?
What was the most important thing you learned while doing the activities in this unit?

Adapted From : Abruscato, J. (1982) Teaching Children Science. Prentice Hall

Unit Evaluation

What went well? _____

_____

How were the suggestions and guidelines offered in the SOS presentation on Integrated Units helpful to you? _____

_____

What problems did you have? _____

_____

How will you correct or avoid those problems in the future? _____

_____

What did you do for follow-up at the end of the unit? _____

_____

What are your plans for future units? _____

_____

What went especially well? _____

_____

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Longfellow Elementary has received numerous awards including the President's Excellence in Education Award. The teaching strategy described in this article was one used by the regular class teachers at the school. It was adapted by the authors to meet the needs of the special day class students.